

Arizona Bureau of Land Management

Solar Energy Development “Four Tracks in Motion”

BLM Solar Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement:

An ongoing federally funded environmental evaluation of potential solar energy development on public lands in six Western States, known as the Solar Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement, or PEIS, has been expanded to include an in-depth analysis of the potential impacts of utility-scale solar energy development on public lands in the 24 Solar Energy Study Areas. This enhancement is supported by additional federal funding under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) will continue to process the 175 active solar applications during preparation of the PEIS. The BLM will also continue to accept new applications both within and outside of the Solar Energy Study Areas. However, these applications will be subject to any decisions made as a result of the Solar PEIS.

This expanded evaluation, a collaborative effort with the Department of Energy, will allow the BLM to take a close look at each study area to determine where it makes sense to develop large-scale solar projects in an environmentally responsible way. Companies proposing solar energy projects in designated areas will be able to “tier” to this study, using it as part of their environmental impact studies for site-specific projects, which are required by the National Environmental Policy Act.

BLM Rights-of-Way Application Process:

The BLM-Arizona has received 34 solar energy applications, encompassing 452,519 acres of public land. In addition, we are anticipating two additional applications that will cover two of the study areas in Arizona identified in the BLM Solar Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (PEIS). The majority of applicants have filed plans of development, outlining the scope of their solar projects.

The Solar Energy Study Areas located in Arizona encompass 16,492 acres. Only lands with excellent solar resources, suitable slope, proximity to roads and transmission lines or designated corridors, and containing at least 2,000 acres of BLM-administered public lands were considered for solar energy study areas. Sensitive lands, wilderness and other high-conservation-value lands as well as lands with conflicting uses were excluded.



The BLM has segregated the study areas from new mining claims and other actions initiated by third parties under public land laws. This two-year segregation will give BLM time to complete its environmental review and make a determination on solar energy zones. It will not affect rights established prior to the temporary segregation. The public will have the opportunity to comment on these proposed solar energy study areas during the environmental reviews before final decisions are made. The evaluation is expected to be completed in late 2010.

Along with California, Nevada and Wyoming, BLM Arizona will be staffing a new Renewable Energy Coordination Office (RECO) to help expedite processing of the increased number of applications for renewable energy projects on public lands in Arizona.

“Fast Track” – Sonoran Solar Energy Project:

Currently, the BLM is moving on an accelerated schedule to process a solar application from Boulevard Associates for the Sonoran Solar Energy Project. Preparation of an environmental impact statement is under way. This is the first BLM solar application to have an environmental review. The project is in Little Rainbow Valley, east of State Route 85, south of the town of Buckeye. Boulevard Associates, LLC, has applied for a right-of-way on public land to construct and operate a 375-megawatt electrical generating facility, using concentrated solar thermal power. The project would require approximately 4,000 acres. The draft environmental impact statement is anticipated to be available for public review in late 2010.

Restoration Design Energy Project:

The Restoration Design Energy Project, funded under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) of 2009, supports President Obama and Interior Secretary Salazar’s goals to build America’s energy resources and to protect and restore treasured landscapes. The purpose of this initiative is to identify disturbed or previously developed sites in Arizona that can be made available for renewable energy development. This will be accomplished through a public process that includes completing an environmental analysis that will evaluate the suitability of sites for the development of renewable energy. The outcomes for this project will be remediation or restoration of public lands; production of renewable energy and community development while providing good value for taxpayers and economic opportunities for business.

